

UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS, FACULTY OF MUSIC AND VISUAL ARTS

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*National and European  
Works for flute by Prosper Ammann*

Abstract of DLA thesis

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2024

## **I. Subject of Research:**

The subject of the research is to study and supplement the biography and flute works of Amtmann Prosper, a flutist-composer, with new data. Additionally, his oeuvre and professional career are discussed within the context of European and Hungarian flute culture in the early 19th century. The dissertation includes a brief presentation of authorss of previously published studies and mentions recordings and concert events associated with Amtmann Prosper. It emphasizes his professional relationships with contemporary flutists active in Europe and provides a brief overview of their careers. An essential parameter in assessing performance activities is knowledge of the flutes of the period, thus presenting Amtmann's instrument. The paper highlights the historical background of music culture, the transformation of public concerts, and the establishment of musical institutions, and how these influenced the careers of musicians. The musical genres (fantasia, variations on opera themes, air) reflect the era, which can be called virtuosic and romantic, during which most contemporary flutists, including Amtmann, created works. The last chapter deals with the "national tone" characteristic of Europe and the Hungarian-inspired compositions found in Amtmann Prosper's oeuvre through an analysis and comparison of works dedicated to each other by Theobald Böhm and Amtmann Prosper, showcasing their compositional and performance qualities.

## **II. Rationale for Topic Selection:**

My first encounter with Amtmann Prosper's works occurred in Pécs during a flute competition named after him. This was the first time his compositions were presented to a wider professional audience and the public in the 20th century. Twenty years later, performing duets dedicated to G. Rabboni provided the impetus for a deeper engagement with his works. Despite my professional experience, the virtuosic musical material of the duets once again confronted me with the exceptional technical level of Amtmann Prosper's era. His documented achievements made it clear that he was a prominent figure in Hungarian flute culture, even by European standards. Given this, it is disproportionately little known about him and his works are played even less, which could be an obvious way to promote his compositions. None of his compositions have been officially published by a music publisher, except for the Air Varié found in the Theobald Böhm archive, which Amtmann dedicated to Böhm. Thus, practical application in expanding the virtuosic flute repertoire of the early 19th century offers opportunities and can be incorporated into middle and upper-level educational materials.

### III. Research Method:

#### 1. Library Research:

The research relied in part on already existing documents and studies, but nearly forty years after their creation, new data have become accessible on various online library platforms. The Austrian National Library<sup>1</sup> archives, as well as contemporary music journals, primarily report on Amtmann Prosper's performance activities and concerts. This access to sources allowed for insights into writings about his peers, thereby making it possible to contextualize Amtmann Prosper's professional activities relative to his contemporaries.

#### 2. Comparative Music Analysis:

Another method of investigation in the dissertation involves the comparative analysis of compositions by Amtmann Prosper and his contemporaries. This can substantiate that while Amtmann's works share similarities in style and nature with others from the first half of the 19th century, they also possess distinctive traits that are often performed. Evaluations are somewhat subjective, but several criteria can be examined to determine the quality of the compositions, such as melodic direction, runs, and technical challenges. Methodologies such as those by W. N. James<sup>2</sup>, R. S. Rockstro<sup>3</sup>, and T. Lindsay<sup>4</sup>, offer insights into the flute playing and compositions of the period. Lindsay's treatise acts as a synthesis of various authors' methodologies, providing a comprehensive overview of the flute performance style of the early 19th century. These writings provide useful ideas for the musical implementation of works from that period, which can also be incorporated into teaching.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://anno.onb.ac.at/anno-suche/simple?from=1>

<sup>2</sup> James, W. N. [1826] *A Word Or Two On The Flute*, London, reprint Tony Bingham 1982

<sup>3</sup> Rockstro, Richard [1890] *A Treatise on the Construction, the History and the Practice of the Flute, Including a Sketch of the Elements of Acoustics and Critical Notices of Sixty Celebrated Flute Players*, 2nd ed. [1967] London: Musica Rara,

<sup>4</sup> Lindsay, Thomas [1828-30] *The Elements of Flute-Playing*, Pendragon Press (2011) Ardal Powell kiadása, London

### 3. Drawing Conclusions from Biographical Data

In the first half of the 19th century, Vienna's musical life was characterized by international dominance, especially in the orchestral world<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, it is highly significant that Amtmann Prosper was the principal flutist at one of the most prestigious theaters in the imperial city. In light of changes in the musical life, Amtmann Prosper's activities in Vienna and his subsequent era as a traveling virtuoso can be contextualized in relation to other flute virtuosos operating in Europe.

#### **IV. Research Findings and Conclusions:**

In Europe, when compared with his contemporaries who were creating and performing at the same time, it can be clearly stated that Amtmann Prosper was a flutist-composer who was recognized on a broader, European scale in the early 19th century, more than what was previously known about him. The multifaceted nature of the topics addressed in the chapters of the dissertation shows that his life's work cannot be fully understood or evaluated without knowledge of the musicological and cultural-historical background. Flutists in the early 19th century, whether as symphonic orchestral musicians or soloists, were exposed to competition. Despite this, Amtmann embarked on a path where, relying solely on his own merits and without any royal patronage, he became a free artist performing concerts across Europe. Vienna at that time had a vibrant musical life, and undoubtedly the years he spent there were significant in allowing him to assess his competitors and place his own qualities in a European context, thus thinking in a broader perspective.

The rise of the bourgeoisie led to increasingly market-based concert performances, changes in concert programs, and audience structures. Virtuosity served as a means to impact audiences, and the indispensable and popular themes of opera music were essential elements in most genres of flute literature. Therefore, the compositions of Amtmann Prosper and other flutists of his era were extremely similar in material. His uniqueness, the cantabile tone, is most recognizable in the slow, poetic Adagio movements. As a performer, his sensitivity and the refined sophistication of his play were praised by contemporary press, describing him not just

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<sup>5</sup> Hanson, Alice M. [1985] *Musical Life in Biedermeier Vienna*, Cambridge, London and New York: Cambridge University Press

as a virtuoso, but as a profoundly impactful instrumental artist. In an era where the vast development and transformation of performance art made many feel they were "virtuoso" artists, Amtmann played the flute at a very high technical level, clearly evident in his works, whose performances are considered challenging even by today's standards.

The unjustly forgotten flutist and composer is primarily validated by his works, and as a performer by the fact that he was a virtuoso known throughout Europe. The fact that he did not achieve the career trajectory for which he was destined could likely be attributed to historical and family reasons that influenced his return home.

Szkladányi Péter writes: "What we must still accept today as a lasting value is the virtuoso music of the flutist-composer, which impacted not through its depth, but through its irresistible technical superiority and brilliance, and getting to know it allows us a new insight into that era."

## V. Selected Bibliography:

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[3] James, W. N. [1826] *A Word Or Two On The Flute*, London, reprint Tony Bingham 1982

[4] Lindsay, Thomas [1828-30] *The Elements of Flute-Playing*, Pendragon Press (2011) Ardal Powell kiadása, London

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[7] Weber, William [2003] *Music and the Middle Class The Social Structure of Concert Life in London, Paris and Vienna between 1830 and 1848* Routledge, Part of: Music in Nineteenth – Century Britain (40 könyv)